

Message Text

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PAGE 01 QUITO 05857 181441Z

43

ACTION ARA-10

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R 181540Z AUG 76

FM AMEMBASSY QUITO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1211

INFO AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL

AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, EC

SUBJECT: REACTION TO DETENTION OF CLERGY IN RIOBAMBA

1. NEWS MEDIA COVERAGE ON GOE DETENTION AUGUST 12-13 OF SOME 48 ECUADOREAN AND FOREIGN CLERGY ON CHARGES OF SUBVERSION CONTINUES. QUITO AND GUAYAQUIL PAPERS CONTINUE PRINTING COMMENTARY FROM FOREIGN COUNTRIES, BUT DOMESTIC REACTION HAS BEEN RELATIVELY LIMITED. MOST FOREIGN COMMENTARIES, TAKEN FROM WIRE SERVICE REPORTS, ARE HIGHLY CRITICAL OF GOE ACTION. EXCEPTIONS TO THIS TREND WERE TWO REPORTS FROM SANTIAGO, ONE OF WHICH REPRINTED AN EL MERCURIO EDITORIAL ON THE INTERVENTION OF CLERGY IN POLITICS, AND THE OTHER SIMPLY REPORTING A HOSTILE DEMONSTRATION WHICH GREETED THE CHILEAN BISHOPS INVOLVED IN THE RIOBAMBA MEETING UPON THEIR RETURN TO SANTIAGO.

2. IN AN AUGUST 16 STATEMENT BISHOP PROANO DENIED THE ACCUSATIONS OF THE MINISTRY OF GOVERNMENT AND REITERATED HIS DEDICATION TO SOCIAL JUSTICE IN RURAL ECUADOR. SEVERAL PRESS ARTICLES HAVE RAISED THE QUESTION AS TO WHETHER THE DETENTION OF BISHOPS VIOLATES THE 1937 ACCORD BETWEEN THE GOE AND THE VATICAN WHICH DEFINES THE RELATION BETWEEN THE CHURCH AND STATE IN ECUADOR. THERE HAVE ALSO BEEN SEVERAL UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 02 QUITO 05857 181441Z

STATEMENTS BY THE ACTING MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT BOTH DE-

FENDING HIS ACTION AND REAFFIRMING THE GOE INTENTION TO MAINTAIN GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE CHURCH.

3. POLITICAL COMMENT HAS BEEN MUTED. TO DATE THE ONLY OFFICIAL POLITICAL PARTY COMMENT HAS COME FROM THE CONSERVATIVE AND THE COMMUNIST PARTIES, THE LATTER UNEQUIVOCALLY SUPPORTING THE DETAINED CLERGY AND CALLING FOR ALL ECUADOREANS TO SUPPORT THE RIGHT OF PEASANTS. THE FORMER ATTACKED THE ARBITRARY NATURE OF THE DETENTIONS WITHOUT DIRECTLY ADDRESSING THE ISSUE OF WHETHER OR NOT THEY WERE JUSTIFIED.

4. SEVERAL CITIZENS' GROUPS BOUGHT NEWSPAPER SPACE TO PROTEST THE PRELATES' ARREST. THE STUDENT FEDERATION AT QUITO'S CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY CONDEMNED THE GOE FOR VIOLATING "ELEMENTAL HUMAN RIGHTS." TWO CAMPESINO GROUPS PUBLISHED A JOINT DECLARATION ACCUSING THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT OF STRONG REPRESSION ON THIS AND EARLIER OCCASIONS AND SAID THAT THIS INCIDENT WAS JUST ONE OF A SERIES OF ACTIONS DENYING BASIC HUMAN RIGHTS BY SOUTH AMERICAN GOVERNMENTS. GONZALO CORDERO CRESPO, PRESIDENT OF THE ECUADOREAN COMMISSION OF JUSTICE AND PEACE, CONDEMNED THE GOE'S ACTION AS BEING CONTRARY TO THE TERMS OF ECUADOR'S CURRENT CONSTITUTION. ASIDE FROM THESE GROUPS WHICH HAVE PURCHASED SPACE TO MAKE THEIR PROTEST, THE EMBASSY HAS HEARD REPORTS OF DISCONTENT WITHIN SOME SECTORS OF THE MILITARY ITSELF OVER THE GOVERNMENT'S ACTIONS.

5. DIRECT EDITORIAL COMMENT HAS BEEN SURPRISINGLY SLOW IN DEVELOPING. EL COMERCIO IN ITS AUGUST 15 EDITION, PRINTED AN EDITORIAL STRADDLING THE ISSUE. IT ALLOWED THAT CHURCHMEN COULD BE COMMUNISTS, WHICH WAS WRONG, BUT THAT, AT ANY RATE, THE GOE'S ACTION IN SEIZING THESE PARTICULAR CHURCHMEN WAS EQUALLY WRONG. A COMMENTARY WHICH APPEARED IN EL UNIVERSO ON AUGUST 15 CASTIGATED THE PAPAL NUNCIO FOR SLEEPING WHILE THE NEWS OF THE DETENTIONS WAS BEING BROADCAST ON TELEVISION. THAT ARTICLE PROMPTED IMMEDIATE REBUTALS FROM THE CARDINAL AND FROM THE PAPAL NUNCIO HIMSELF, BOTH DEFENDING THE ACTION OF THE NUNCIO AND THE CHURCH HIERARCHY. AN EDITORIAL IN EL UNIVERSO AND COMMENTARIES BOTH IN THAT PAPER AND EL TELEGRAFO WHICH APPEARED AUGUST 17

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UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 03 QUITO 05857 181441Z

GENERALLY DEFENDED THE GOE'S ACTION, EMPHASIZING THE PROBLEM OF FOREIGNERS INVOLVED IN DOMESTIC ISSUES. ONE KEY ISSUE REFLECTED IN THE AUGUST 17 COMMENTARIES INVOLVES A STATEMENT BY VENEZUELAN PRESIDENT PEREZ OFFERING THE GOV'S FULL SUPPORT FOR THE BISHOP OF CUMANA, MONSEÑOR PARRA, WHO REMAINS IN A QUITO HOSPITAL AFTER SUFFERING A HEART ATTACK DURING THE DETENTION. THE COMMENTARIES WERE OPPOSED TO PEREZ' ACTION AND CALLED ON THE GOE TO PROTEST THIS

ADDED FOREIGN INTERVENTION.
BLOOMFIELD

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